

Chalmers M. Roberts Post 9/19/73

The U.S. Integrity Gap

The take-over in Chile by a military junta has demonstrated that the U.S. government in general and the Nixon administration in particular is suffering from a credibility gap. Allegations that the coup was engineered, or at least encouraged, by Washington through the Central Intelligence Agency are being made around the world. The administration, while conceding that it did have some advance tips that the take-over was coming, denies that it had any part in the affair and, specifically, that the President had heard the reports in time to do anything about them, even if he had wished to do so.

The CIA starts out with several strikes against it. After all it is well known that the agency did engineer a coup against the leftist government of Guatemala in 1954; that it had a hand in saving the Shah of Iran's throne in 1952; that it tried unsuccessfully to topple Sukarno's government in Indonesia; that it was central to the fiasco at the Bay of Pigs; that it has been involved in intrusions into Com-

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munist China; and that it conducted for years a secret war in Laos. President Nixon himself recently referred to the Iranian affair without mentioning the CIA role. He finally conceded, last year, that two Americans long held by China were, in fact, CIA operatives. And so on.

As to Chile, the CIA says its hands are clean. But it is on the public record that John McCone, the former head of the CIA, offered a big chunk of money to the agency on behalf of his new employer, International Telephone and Telegraph, to help prevent Salvadore Allende from coming to power. So it is not likely that those who want to believe the CIA is in-

involved in the anti-Allende coup will give the CIA a clean bill of health. As for those who hope, or even believe, that the CIA has learned some lessons or been reined in, it is not very easy to accept, on their face, the current CIA denials. Maybe they are true; but just maybe they are not.

But it isn't just a matter of the CIA; it's President Nixon himself. When you consider his record for dissembling, it makes you wonder about Chile.

During the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon campaign, candidate Kennedy proposed strengthening the anti-Castro forces. But candidate Nixon, who then was the Vice President, knew about the secret Bay of Pigs plan and, to protect the prospects of that invasion, he had to "go to the other extreme" and attack the Kennedy proposal as "dangerously irresponsible," as he himself has written. In short, he lied to cover the operation. More recently, as President, Mr. Nixon secretly authorized the undisclosed bombing of Cambodia while telling the public that the United States was not violating that country's neutrality. As to Laos, he admitted American involvement only when forced to do so by a Senate investigation. In time we shall probably hear of other similar cases now still hidden.

In short, Mr. Nixon's record of credibility hardly encourages one to accept protestations of innocence in Chile. It reminds me of Thurston the Magician who used to show you how empty his sleeves were; he then proceeded to pull from them an amazing assortment

of cards, scarves and other paraphernalia of his trade.

In the case of the Bay of Pigs Mr. Nixon, writing in his "Six Crises," never questioned the propriety or legality of the operation against Castro. "The covert operation had to be protected at all costs," he wrote. There is nothing in the Nixon record to indicate that he has in any way altered that point of view. Indeed, the justification in the Watergate case for trying to head off an FBI investigation of the Mexican money transactions was essentially the same. In short, the end justifies the means whenever the end is a matter affecting "national security."

President Nixon's aversion, to put it mildly, to the Allende regime was

well known. His administration kept on supplying military aid while withholding economic help; international organizations were encouraged not to help Allende. The American ambassador had just made a quick trip back to Washington and had returned to Chile prior to the takeover. Put it all together and the only conclusion one can come to, given the record, is no clear conclusion — and a reasonable doubt about any official conclusion offered by the government.

Perhaps not directly related to Chile but part of the Nixon backdrop to his foreign policy methods is his penchant for surprises, for the quick switch, and for secrecy. Dollar devaluation, the change in China policy, the "Nixon shocks" to Japan, the mining of Haiphong harbor—even the switch to Phase I economic controls here at home—all testify to this style of doing business. Who can guess what he may have in mind for Latin America, where Henry Kissinger says he wants to institute new policies?

Integrity is perhaps the most precious asset that a government can have. The sad fact is that in the post-World War II decades successive administrations have eaten away at governmental integrity. One has only to recall President Roosevelt and the se-

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cret Yalta agreements, President Eisenhower's handling of the U-2 affair, President Kennedy's initial covert operations in Indochina and the panoply of evasions by President Johnson as documented in the Pentagon Papers. By the time Mr. Nixon got into the White House, government integrity had indeed suffered.

Somewhere along the line Mr. Nixon became entranced with General Charles deGaulle's idea of the "mystique" of high office, of holding aloof from the public, of treating the public like school children in a "papa knows best" manner. He is not the first President to act this way; it seems to be a failing of those chief executives in particular who have been quickest to wrap themselves in the "national security" blanket. But as President, Mr. Nixon has carried it to hitherto unknown extremes.

Perhaps the United States had no direct role in the Chilean affair; there certainly was reason enough, in internal Chilean terms, for the take-over, without judging the right or wrong of it. But this administration's credibility is so low, who can believe its denials?